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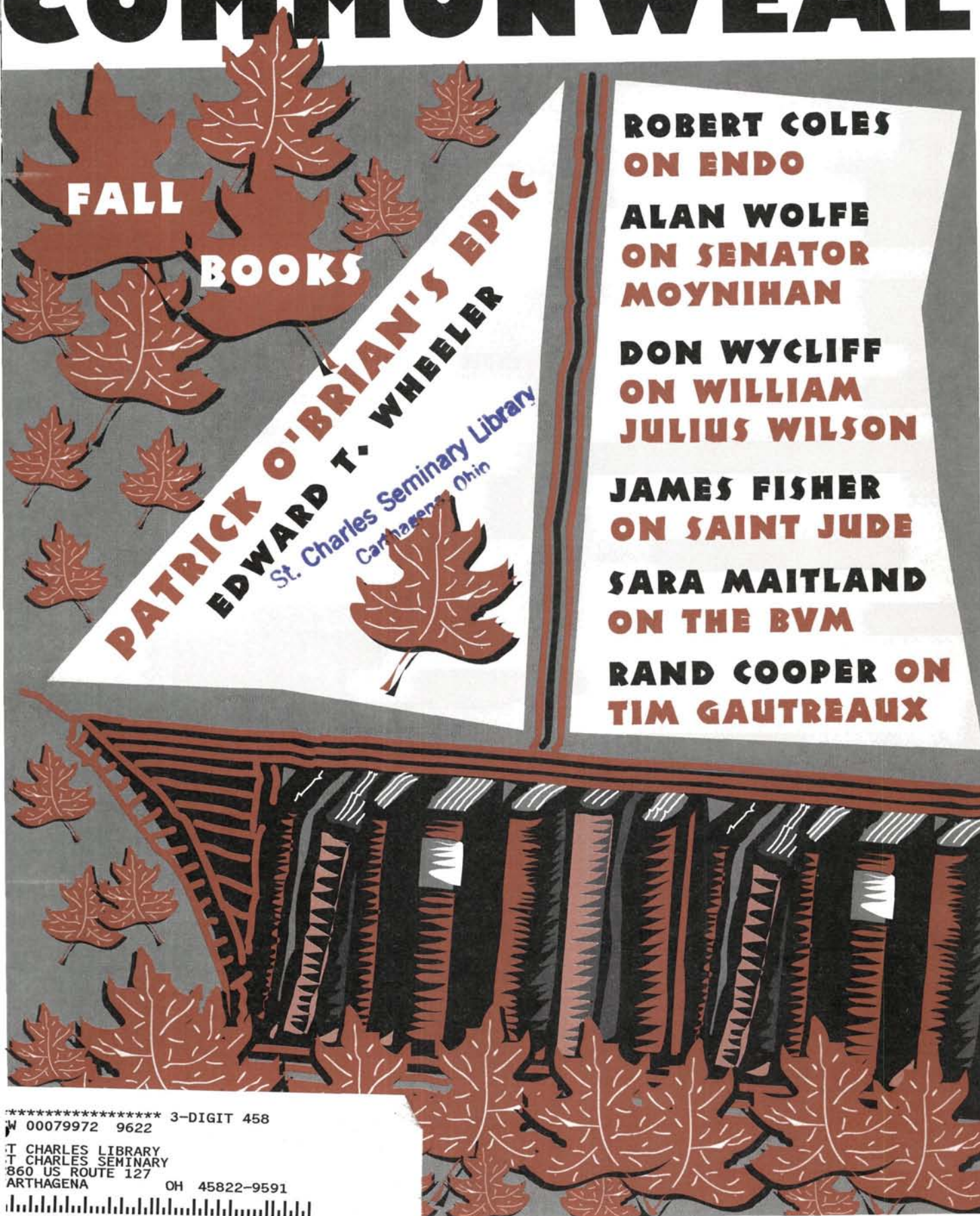
FALL BOOKS
PATRICK O'BRIAN'S EPIC
EDWARD T. WHEELER
ROBERT COLES ON ENDO
ALAN WOLFE ON SENATOR MOYNIHAN
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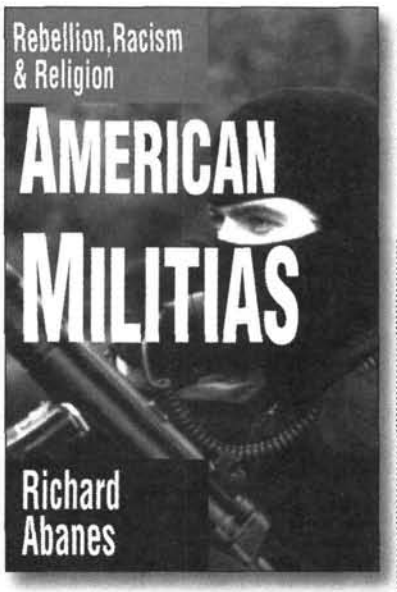

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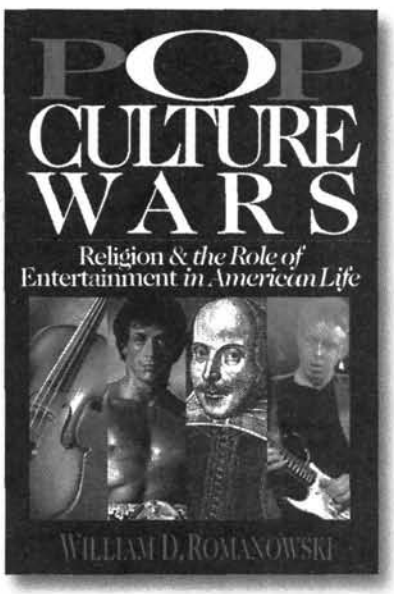

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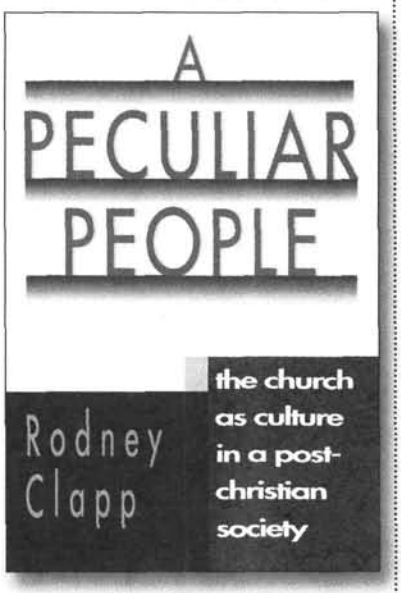

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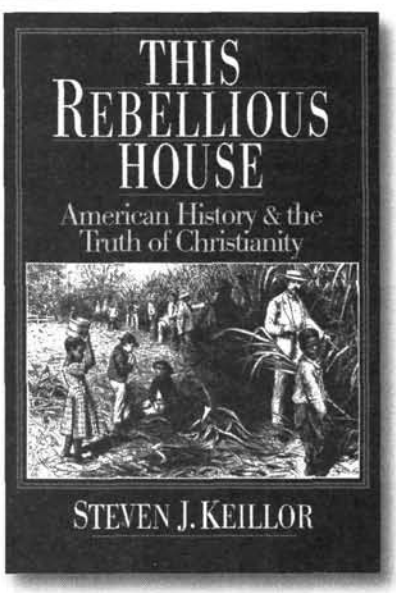

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COMMONWEAL

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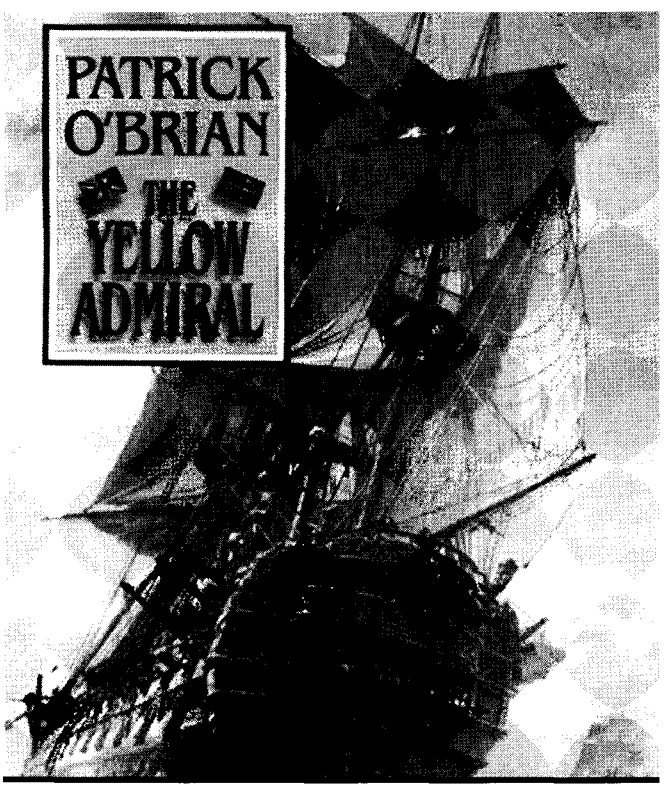

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To the Editors

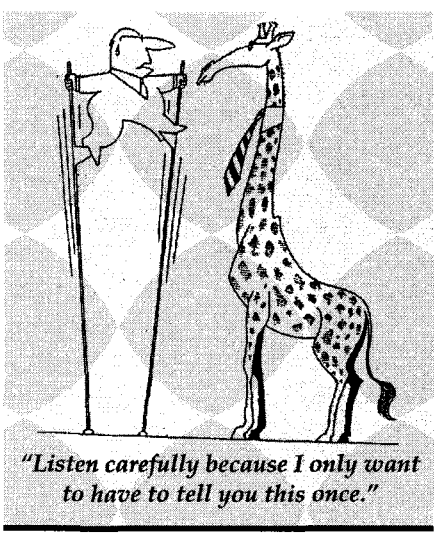
Illinois's Catholic solon

Gregory R. Beabout's article "Catholic Wins" [October 11] says that no Catholic has ever served in the Senate from Illinois in the past. In fact, in the 1850s Illinois was represented in the Senate by Irish-born Catholic James Shields. After the Civil War, in which he served as a Union general, this peripatetic statesman was sent to the Senate by Minnesota and later by Missouri.

WILLIAM B. PRENDERGAST
McLean, Va.

Ollie & the Coalition

In your issue of September 27, neither Frank McConnell, discussing the PBS series on the Religious Right, nor R. Scott Appleby, in his review of *Active Faith* by Ralph Reed, makes any mention of the Christian Coalition's support for the Iran-*contra* criminal Oliver North in his 1994 candidacy for the United States Senate. That single act of sacrilege makes a mockery of the motto "people of faith first, Americans second, and Democrats or Republicans third." It also belies Ralph Reed's contention that religious conservatives in America aren't like fundamentalist movements in the Middle East.



"Listen carefully because I only want to have to tell you this once."

Ever since North lost, the Christian Coalition has acted as if the whole thing never happened, and the news media have done likewise. Someone should ask Ralph Reed to his smiling face about his organization's support for a rogue officer who sold American arms to a pariah state authoritatively described as supportive of terrorism. Reed should be given a chance to repent; only if he does will he deserve a place at the table.

WALLINGTON M. SIMPSON, JR.
Montebello, N.Y.

Keep it civil

As one who has spent more than half a long lifetime as a Catholic (coming out of a large, very vocal anti-Catholic Protestant group), I applaud with loud whoopees and shrill whistles the position expressed in the "In Good Faith" editorial of September 13

Discussions of legitimate differences will not remove me from this church that I love, including both its historical and current warts. I sincerely hope that blind, hate-filled, unreasoning bickering will not force me to reconsider.

CHARLOTTE E. WRIGHT
Midland, Tex.

Yes, change is tough

I read with great interest and not a little disappointment Peter Steinfels's essay [September 13] on our book [*Laity, American and Catholic*, William D'Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Ruth A. Wallace; Sheed & Ward]. I was particularly disappointed with Steinfels's assertion that we are "the kind of moderate reformists who believe that a social organism like the church can pass relatively easily from one state to another with no real threat to its substance or essential character."

From the opening preface to the concluding pages of the final chapter, we make clear that we perceive the Catholic church in the United States to be caught up in a struggle that is at its roots grounded in the question of the nature and locus of authority. And while I for one envision a much more democratic church as reflecting more closely the teachings of Jesus than does the present hierarchic church, I am not naive enough to think such radical change can be easily brought about. It is precisely because we understood how difficult it has been to bring about change that we closed the book with John Noonan's carefully nuanced reminder (in his essay, "Development in Moral Doctrine," *Theological Studies*, 1993) about both the resistance to and the reality of change in the church throughout its history.

It is not surprising to find that John Noonan is listed among those persons who have agreed to work with Cardinal Bernardin to seek "Common Ground."

Discussing that project in the following issue [September 27], columnist Sidney Callahan writes of the recognition that "[i]ntrachurch conflicts of conscience over difficult issues can no longer be quelled by some church authority unilaterally issuing a directive." I believe our *Laity* book has helped make clear what those conflicts are—just as Charles Curran's essay "Two Traditions" [*Commonweal*, October 11] makes clear why they may be so difficult to resolve.

Finally, I note that Ms. Callahan described the twenty-four persons so far identified as members of the Common Ground project as "irreproachable mainstream Catholics." At least some of the Catholics in our study—in particular those we have identified as most committed to the church (they go to Mass every week, say they would never leave the church, say the church is one of the most important influences on their lives)—are also "irreproachable mainstream Catholics," who seek a more democratic church, with significant lay participation.

WILLIAM V. D'ANTONIO
Washington, D.C.

(Continued on page 29)

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Stop thief! Please!

Crime is going down. At least that is what the nationwide statistical evidence suggests. And as in so many things, New York City is leading the way. Crime was down 17 percent last year, 12 percent the year before, and we are assured that it is falling this year, too. But crime is not receding on Dutch Street.

Commonweal has been robbed—burgled, vandalized, pilfered, ripped-off, ransacked, you name it—twice in a mere two-week period. First the fiends broke into the office in the wee hours by tearing a hole through a wall from the outside hall. Through the wall! (As it turned out, the exterior wall had an unsuspected—at least by us!—vulnerability.) Once inside, the villains smashed a door and absconded with production editor Jackie Dowdell's computer hard drive, keyboard, and (very expensive) printer. Jackie, barely blinking an eye but muttering a Presbyterian oath, miraculously met her impending deadline. Our estimated loss was $6,000, plus a new appreciation of New York night life.

Over the Columbus Day weekend the thieves returned—this time drilling through the steel-plated front door—and more or less cleaned us out, taking $10,000 worth of office equipment and personal possessions, including two computers, our fax, the new printer, a scanner...well, it's too depressing to itemize. Then there's the cost of the new alarm system.

As you might imagine, we feel a little exposed to the elements at the moment. Yes, Job had it somewhat worse, but he didn't have a magazine to put out every two weeks. The only redeeming factors in this catastrophe are that no one has been physically endangered (yet), and it has momentarily taken our attention off the dullest presidential election race in memory. Yes, we are taking many steps to make the office secure—barbed wire? sentries? holy water?—but the work ethic of these cutpurses is intimidating.

Though we dealt stoically with the first break-in, the second intrusion has taken some of the wind out of our sails. Associate Editor Paul Baumann, known for his enlightened views on capital punishment, was heard expressing admiration for how certain Islamic regimes punish thieves. Senior Writer Robert Hoyt was shocked by this retributive ethic, and assured the staff that higher taxes and a federal jobs program (or just higher taxes) is the better response. "This is not what I mean when I praise 'entrepreneurial energy,'" countered Business Manager Richard Haas as he surveyed the wreckage and tallied up the damage.

Our editor calmed the staff by noting that burglary is not something people from Chicago, or the Upper West Side for that matter, do. She suspects the criminals came from New Jersey. Both Publisher Edward Skillin and Managing Editor Patrick Jordan prayed for the burglars, but also for the cops and the insurance company. Especially for the insurance company.

Bernard Prusak, our new intern, displayed an impressive equanimity, expressing a suspicion that the break-ins were part of an elaborate *Commonweal* hazing ritual, one that had begun with his being stuck in the building's elevator his

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very first week of work. Others hastened to note that the burglaries have suspiciously coincided with Bernard's arrival at Dutch Street. Even more suspiciously, just as we go to press Bernard announced that he has found a "spacious" Manhattan apartment.

Jackie Dowdell, soon to be beatified, has continued without (much) complaint to put out the magazine despite the fact that every time she turns around someone steals everything off her desk. However, she was seen sending off her applications to graduate schools using Federal Express.

In short, if you find us a bit jumpy for the next few issues, you now know the reason.

ET CETERA

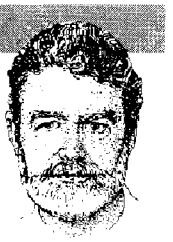
FAITH & TREASON & CHARM ■ Historian Antonia Fraser is the biographer of Mary Queen of Scots and the six ill-fated wives of Henry VIII. Her new book, *Faith and Treason: The Story of the Gunpowder Plot* (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, $27.95, 347 pp.), arrived in bookstores just in time for Halloween and the bonfires of Guy Fawkes Day (November 5). Last month Fraser spoke to an adoring crowd at the Barnes and Noble superstore near Lincoln Center, whom she charmed with her eloquence, wit, and melodious English accent.

Guy Fawkes, burned in effigy throughout England each November 5, was apprehended in the midst of barrels of gunpowder in the cellars of Parliament on November 5, 1605. After being tortured, Fawkes confessed to planning to blow up King James I as the monarch was opening the Parliament. Fawkes and his fellow Catholic conspirators hoped both to take revenge for the persecution of Catholics and to seize power. Predictably, a period of even more intense persecution followed the failed plot. The torture and execution of the conspirators were particularly grisly, Fraser warned her readers.

Fraser, a Catholic, said she was not writing an apology for terrorism, but trying to tell the story of how a community suffers as a consequence of the terrorist acts of a few of its members. She was especially interested in telling the story of how Catholic women shrewdly defied the authorities. Researching and writing the book convinced her that there had indeed been a conspiracy, but that it was not as widespread as the government contended. In short, the government used the plot as an excuse to suppress Catholic opposition.

OF SEVERAL MINDS

JOHN GARVEY



HENRI NOUWEN

Restless no more

Henri Nouwen died recently while visiting his father in Holland. I met him when he was a visiting professor of psychology at Notre Dame in 1967. He had come there from the Menninger Clinic in Kansas, and after he left Notre Dame he was to go on to complete a doctorate in theology, and then to Yale and Harvard, with other important times spent in Latin America, a Trappist monastery, as well as travels all over the United States and Europe. He finally settled at Jean Vanier's L'Arche community in Ontario, where he served as chaplain. His life, work, and travels generated many books.

During the first year of our marriage, Regina and I lived in South Bend and were close to friends at Notre Dame. It was Henri's last year there, and he was conscious of the pain of leaving friends. He was a restless man who formed strong attachments; he seemed both to need to put down roots, and to move on. He found the home he needed at L'Arche, I think; but he had some very difficult and unhappy times before coming to that final and welcome place.

Some people accused Henri of a kind of trendiness. He was interested in youth culture when that was fashionable, for example (I can remember a Mass he celebrated one night during the sixties in a coffee house following the appearance of the group Stone Pony, whose lead singer was Linda Ronstadt); he was interested in the Latin American political scene when liberation theology was in the air.

But this is unfair. Henri tried to see the work of the Holy Spirit everywhere, but he was keenly aware of the limits of psychology and psychological language, and the dangers in liberation theology. I remember a conversation in which he insisted that psychological jargon should be resisted when we talk about spirituality; the language traditionally used by the Fathers and Mothers of the Desert (whose work he loved) was perfectly adequate. And he believed that any theology that dealt honestly with justice and liberation must also provide a spirituality which could deal with the defeat of the hopes of the poor, and the failure of justice. The cross was very much at the center of his faith. He worried that this sense was being lost in contemporary Catholicism, and was unhappy with many of the changes he saw in the Catholic church in Holland.

Henri was deeply attracted to monastic life—my favorite of his books is *Genesee Diary*, an account of his time at that monastery—but he understood that he was not called to be a monk. He was restless for much of his life. It occurred to me that unlike a monk, a married person, or most diocesan priests, Henri did not have a way of life that demanded stability, and I believe he suffered from that. One friend of mine who read many of his books

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was shocked when she read *Genesee Diary*, because he confessed to the most petty annoyances, melancholy, impatience, frustrations; she had expected wisdom and serenity. But then she realized that this was precisely what made his work valuable. It revealed the fact that the spiritual life involves precisely this sort of wrestling with our most minor irritants and irrational responses. It isn't dramatic, most of the time.

This was one of the reasons he was attracted to Orthodox spirituality. He saw that it understood the psychology of spirituality at that incarnate level, without needing the jargon of contemporary psychology, and at the same time it was capable (unlike any psychology) of looking at the cross and the hope of resurrection. When I became Orthodox I received a letter from Henri that both revealed his sorrow at my decision, and at the same time his understanding and support. He had (and has) a lot of Orthodox fans.

During the last ten years of his life Henri served L'Arche, a nondenominational community founded by Jean Vanier, a Canadian Catholic layman. L'Arche is made up of disabled and nondisabled people who live in community. Henri wrote movingly of his experience with mentally retarded people and of the holiness he found there. A few years ago he was terribly injured when he was hit by a truck as he walked through the rain to help one of the members of the community to begin his day. He told me that the accident was a blessing in disguise (prompting me to remember the old line, "I sure can see the disguise") because it forced him to slow down, something that didn't come naturally to him.

He was a deeply compassionate man who understood the relationship between suffering and love. In *In Memoriam*, a book written after the death of his mother, he wrote, "Why do we think that Christian death is an easy death? Why do we believe that the hope for a life with Christ will make our death a gentle passage? A compassionate life is a life in which the suffering of others is deeply felt, and such a life may also make one's death an act of dying with others...."

I remember a sermon he preached once at Notre Dame. Henri spoke of the mystery of suffering, and ended by saying, "When we look deeply into our suffering, we see at the depths of suffering the suffering face of Jesus Christ—who is our joy." □

Become a Commonweal Associate

Robert Coles

SHUSAKU ENDO

At the river's edge

With the recent death of Shusaku Endo, in Tokyo, at seventy-three, after a long struggle with hepatitis, Japan lost one of its foremost novelists, short-story writers, and playwrights. Endo's readers across the continents will surely feel deeply the departure of a major literary figure whose special interest and talent was to offer a repeated (and each time brilliantly original) consideration of our moral and spiritual fate as creatures of language, all too aware of the mere second of eternity granted us—at least biologically. For his Japanese compatriots, Endo was a learned interpreter of the Christian story, many of whose mysteries have not been either understood or welcomed on an island-nation determined for so long to exclude foreign influences. For us in the West, Endo has naturally been a helpful observer of his country's modern life, with its mix of an aggressive (and sheltered) capitalism and a traditional culture; and too, he has been an eager chronicler of Japanese history as it has been connected with the West's commercial and religious expansionism.

Endo was brought up by a mother who divorced his father a few years after their son was born, then became a Catholic, and had the boy baptized at the age of eleven. He went to college, did graduate work, and very important, spent three years of study during his late twenties in France, where he became admiringly familiar with the novels of François Mauriac and Georges Bernanos. Indeed, his Catholicism is close kin to theirs—personal, passionate, humbly and self-critically confessional, anything but triumphal. His fictional priests, not to mention his Jesus, are like those of Mauriac and Bernanos, innocents all too readily betrayed, vulnerable at every turn to the cynical manipulations of a world whose nature, of course, their presence paradoxically both confronts and defines.

If those two twentieth-century French novelists helped Endo to get his spiritual bearings, it is the seventeenth-century of attempted Catholic penetration of Japan that inspired two of his most important novels, *Silence*, the one best known to Westerners, and *Samurai*, the one that was the most successful in Japan. *Silence* draws on the ill-fated effort of the Portuguese missionaries to convert Japan's ordinary people to Catholicism—the novel tells of a priest's search for the truth of another priest's encounter with the fierce, persecutory response of Japan's religious and civil authorities to Western evangelism. Soon enough the priest as investigator becomes the priest as pursued outsider, and in time, the priest as captive, threatened with torture and death, but threat-

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ened even more by the huge moral choice put to him by relentless and cruelly ingenious persecutors, who in their own way have absorbed enough of the Catholic faith's tenets and values to know how to use them to stunning effect on those who have come to Japan. If the priests apostatize, they spare others torture and death. All these men of the cloth need to do to save their fellow Catholics is to desecrate an icon, trample on it. The alternative, naturally, is their own martyrdom—but accompanying such a slow and painful death would be the knowledge that many fellow Christians will go down with them and would endure unspeakable suffering, which it is given to these priests to prevent. Here a theology (and psychology) becomes exceedingly complex: apostasy as, in effect, a cowardly self-serving renunciation of faith, elaborately rationalized to be an act of compassionate generosity, a sacrifice of one's principles on the behalf of others; or apostasy as itself a leap of faith, a victory over the sin of sins, pride—in this instance, the pride of martyrdom. Not that the novel ever gets didactic or smugly sure of what is right or wrong. Rather, we are drawn into the gripping story's enormous ethical and spiritual dilemmas, its dramatic, surprising plot, its compelling evocation of character, of priestly inwardness as it tries to come to terms with social reality, political power, and most challenging of all, the conceits and deceits to which we are all heir, including, of course, men of the cloth.

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Silence scandalized some in Japan's relatively small Catholic community, as it has others in countries more populously Catholic, even as many Catholics and non-Catholics have regarded it as a major witness to Christian introspection. The novel's central protagonist is not unlike the curé in Bernanos's *The Diary of a Country Priest*, with his learned skepticism of his own church, his lovely, endearing innocence (which, however, can set in motion its very own kind of evil), and ultimately, his terrible frailty—his physical and moral jeopardy a prelude to his spiritual salvation, we begin to realize.

In *Samurai*, Endo also calls upon the seventeenth century. A Japanese warrior goes West (to Mexico, Spain, even the Vatican) in pursuit of trade agreements for Japanese merchants; to that end, he feigns conversion to the Catholic church, but all to no avail. History betrays his mission (the doors to open trade are yet again shut) and the samurai (who had only pretended his conversion) becomes a persecuted outsider. Through suffering, the protagonist grows to understand how Jesus lived, what he tried to do and to be, and to love him dearly. As in *Silence*, *Samurai* renders a spiritual journey, connects it to an intercontinental one (Endo's inevitable East-West preoccupation), and most tellingly, makes use of a many-layered, subtle psychology (deceptions, self-deceptions, pretenses that become hauntingly, ironically, sincerely held convictions). Endo studied psychoanalysis intently, especially Jung's version of it, and no doubt got a bit of help from that knowledge in his representation of his characters' interior life.

A last novel of this Japanese master, *Deep River* (New Directions), was published earlier this year in an English translation. A plane load of Japanese men and women, well-to-do but far from well-off mentally or spiritually, go to India, and journey to the awesome, puzzling, unnerving shores of the mighty Ganges river; a secular world of comfort and unease, of self-assurance and apprehension, boredom, disappointment, and melancholy arrives at the banks of Hinduism. As he has in many of his novels and short stories, Endo yet again confronts contemporary affluence (its achievements, its sway and might) with its other face, the hunger and thirst for meaning, the moral neediness of so many of us. The result is a story that addresses a universal audience, pilgrims, wayfarers, seeing yet blind, hoping against hope for a visionary breakthrough. The history of such a break-through. is what Shusaku Endo has offered us secular materialists who with him have inhabited this century of great progress, this century of unparalleled murderousness: a sense of moral distinction, a glimpse of what moral choices and responsibilities await us, even a sighting, as it were, of the Lord himself. (Endo, like his mentor Mauriac, wrote *A Life of Jesus*.) That is no small gift in a time that has presented us with hazards, trials, and possibilities as momentous as any faced by those martyrs, those much-beleaguered, much-challenged seekers of the past who populate *Silence* or *Samurai*. □

Robert Coles *is a child psychiatrist, and the author, most recently, of* The Call of Service: A Witness to Idealism *(Houghton Mifflin).*

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AHOY!

Patrick O'Brian sails again

Edward T. Wheeler

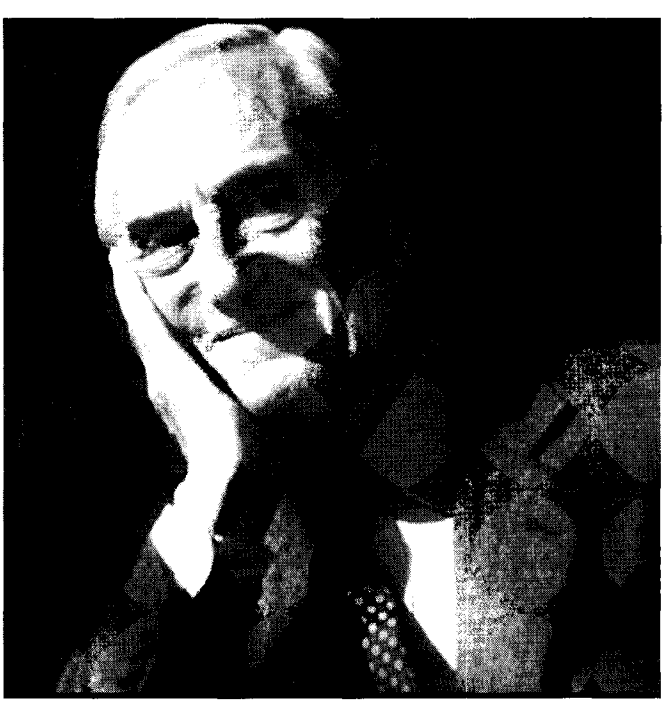
The enormous success of Patrick O'Brian's historical novels defies any simple explanation. Perhaps the current interest in film adaptations of Jane Austen's works offer some explanatory clue. Indeed, the two authors share a loving devotion to the Royal Navy at the time of the Napoleonic campaigns, but O'Brian sails with hindsight into waters which Miss Austen could only imagine, landlocked as she was ashore. Norton, O'Brian's publishers, certainly cannot be at sea when they regard the enormous sales figures; their best-selling author can even be found smiling quizzically from his own spot on their internet home page. Perhaps he wonders about the on-line links to a chat group and a list-serv which allow, well, a little ebb and flow of conversation for his readers after the novels are read and reread.

Whatever the case may be, the good news in the Patrick O'Brian home port is that the eighteenth Aubrey/Maturin novel, *The Yellow Admiral* (Norton, $24, 262 pp.), has just been published. The bad news lies in the fact that the master storyteller is over eighty and the likelihood of many more novels in the series is surely fading away. O'Brian's books have been justly called the best historical novels ever written, and no less a critic than Oxford's John Bayley admires their subtlety of characterization and talks of their Jamesian "felt life." To wonder about the fuss which O'Brian has created is to pose implicitly a question about genre. Can historical fiction really be worth the bother? Suffice it to say, O'Brian is not Melville nor does he choose to be. A Homer, perhaps, and it is of Homer that the redoubtable O'Brian asks readers to think when they judge his fiction. And it is to Homer we have to return to consider the nature of O'Brian's achievement. But first let an admirer open the log.

"Lucky Jack" Aubrey is O'Brian's hero. As a young man Aubrey was known as "Goldilocks" for his flowing blond hair, and he cannonaded his way in Mediterranean combat up the ladder of promotion, weighting his pockets with prize money and his shoulders with increasing burdens of responsibility. He sails in Nelson's navy accompanied in battle and in the playing of string duets by his fellow musician, the surgeon/secret agent, Stephen Maturin. (O'Brian himself is a former member of British intelligence.) Stephen has encyclopedic knowledge of the world's flora and fauna; he also has a cool ferocity in espionage which must relate to his dueling days at Trinity College in Dublin.

Whatever their pedigrees and special talents, the structural advantages which derive from the pairing of these two heroes are many. A Watson can be a foil to Holmes or follow separate adventures. Jack is of good eccentric, patrician stock, and never happier than when driving his favorite ship, *H.M.S. Surprise*, hull down in pursuit of a fleeing Frenchman. Stephen is an Irish/Catalonian doctor (a "good Catholic" one might add) with a fluency in the classics matched only by his clumsiness at sea and his unfailing ability to forget important dining engagements—generally because he is in pursuit of some rare specimen of flora or fauna. In one novel, *The Thirteen-Gun Salute*, Stephen tracks an orangutan up a mountain to a Buddhist monastery while Jack...what was Jack doing then?

That question might have you "flogged round the fleet" in O'Brian circles. And if you want to know what makes that punishment dire, there are squadrons of reference books on the O'Brian series to help you fight off ignorance and, in the case of the intricacies of sailing a square-rigged ship, condemn you to much more. "Getting to know the ropes" is part of the appeal of the series—and for some of us part of the mystery.



Edward T. Wheeler, *a frequent* Commonweal *contributor, is dean of the faculty at the Williams School in New London, Connecticut.*

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Yes, many of us do possess all of the books in paper and covet the hard-cover set; we rationalize that although each volume can be read as a novel on its own, the series as a whole builds into one great work and is best read end to end, more than once. (The first book, *Master and Commander*, is a particular favorite as is *Desolation Island* which features the eerie battle in the Antarctic with the Dutch ship, *Waakzaamheid*.) In all likelihood, O'Brian enthusiasts spent their adolescence reading C.S. Forester's Hornblower series and find in O'Brian (this disclaimer always appears in some form when the two are compared) "with no condescension to Forester," an adult equivalent. His appeal is surprisingly gender neutral. The lively list-serv group (computer subscribers are collectively known as *list-swains*) is in its own way an "enabling metaphor" which helps to explain the O'Brian phenomenon. The on-line postings are frequently couched in the language of the two heroes and often concern the technicalities of seamanship or naval tactics. O'Brian offers his readers (*pace* Groucho) membership in that longed-for club which they want to join and which *will* have them.

The experience of reading O'Brian is that of gracious acceptance at one of the banquets of life's feast. As Jack says, "A glass of wine with you, sir—or madam." And we do thank him as we go with him and Stephen into staterooms, lowly inns, Polynesian palaces, and French prisons. Jack's appetites are immense; his weight is perpetually increasing. Only the inevitable catastrophe can starve him into a more reasonable form. Stephen, alas, no trencherman, must combat a different appetite, for the narcotic tincture of opium, laudanum. And then there is the dialogue. To listen in on such accomplished people, gimballing over the ocean on impossible missions, making erudite remarks on sea birds, on navigation, or on the intricacies of foreign policy, is to experience the "felt life." I suppose only some of us can translate all the Latin or understand the technicalities of sailing trim, but we are content to read ourselves into the company of these people.

Jack is a warrior eager for glory and spoil. He loves battle, and follows Nelson's adage, "Never mind maneuvers, always go at them." Jack's extraordinary skills as a sailor are played off his equally great skills as a tactician and gunner. His physical courage and his excitement in battle court much wish-fulfillment with each stroke of his "heavy cavalry saber." Stephen as secret agent toils in the labyrinths of the admiralty's plots to undermine Napoleon's quest for world dominion. Since the influence of both Britain and France extends to the ends of the earth, O'Brian has the globe on which to trace the exotic assignments of his naturalist-cryptographer. At one stage Stephen has the peculiar delight of combining both his vocations; he dissects the corpses of two traitorous double agents. In Java no less!

Both heroes have significant others, Sophie, Jack's wife, and Diana, Stephen's (and Jack's) impossible mistress and latterly his spouse. Romance and domestic friction push our heroes onward—together.

We have to ask, can serious reading be so much fun? To answer invokes a schizoid response requiring a double-take on O'Brian's skill in taking us so disarmingly into the past. There is no question that the work immerses us in the wooden world of sailing ships and, in so far as the heroes venture onto dry land, into nineteenth-century domestic arrangements and geopolitical machinations. And it does this brilliantly. (Authorities in naval architecture and history speak with reverence of O'Brian's deep knowledge.) One could argue that the series is melodrama; in most cases the good and the evil are clearly defined, Jack is a professional sailor and Stephen needs no more justification than his love of national independence and his hatred of Napoleon's tyranny to fight his way into ascendancy. Jack does suffer loss of faith in his beloved navy, but his and its redemption come about rather by keeping on keeping on. Nelson's adage again. These novels are stories, good stories; they don't take us to the heart of any metaphysical mystery like that of Melville's white whale, nor do they give us an epic revaluation of a culture through the tragedy of the heroes. But the demands of the genre are compelling enough: to write a novel eighteen volumes in length and to tie it to a specific period is to write a sort of salvation history, the author as god working out his purposes in and on his chosen heroes; Jack and Stephen simply cannot be seen to suffer tragic loss or change, at least in the experience of those who read the books. If in volume five there appears to be no escape from the snares of the enemy, the testimony of about a foot of shelf space occupied by the remaining novels in the series has an oddly corrective effect: it will work out.

Obviously, this is not the same understanding a reader has in *The Odyssey* or *The Iliad* when the perspective is that of the gods. The great design worked out here is not eternity's but the novelist's; where his novels most invite and most fulfill wishes, they challenge least. Still, these are not negligible reading pleasures. Let O'Brian comment himself: "A narrative set in the past may have its particular, time-free value; and the candid reader will not misunderstand me, will not suppose that I intend any preposterous comparison, when I observe that Homer was farther removed in time from Troy than I am from the Napoleonic wars; yet he spoke to the Greeks for two thousand years and more."

Patrick O'Brian is not a blind epic singer nor does his work hold up an unsettling mirror to an audience hanging rapt upon his tale; he has a very wary eye cocked to gauge the effects of what he says and writes. His coy warning about drawing "preposterous comparisons" is not the sort of humility which disarms reproof. The Homeric simile is one indication of the source of his success: he rather cannonballs us over and gives himself a few millennia's leeway to assess the impact. O'Brian's vivid recreation of the Napoleonic wars works out a remarkably reassuring sense of the past. It's hard not to find him irresistible. □

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Robert F. Moss

TV COP SHOWS COP-OUT ON RACE

The real world it ain't

It's happening everywhere. In Baltimore, Lt. Al Giardello, the black shift commander on "Homicide," bellows paternally at his mostly white troops. Up in New York City, another black lieutenant, Anita Van Buren of "Law and Order," dresses down an errant white subordinate, while across town Lt. Arthur Fancy (of "NYPD Blue") comforts a wounded white detective.

Viewers seeking escape from the racial tribulations of our times could do a lot worse than tune in to a current cop show. In TV's station houses, racism is practically extinct, black officers are well represented in the upper ranks, and a multiracial camaraderie prevails. Conceived as entertainment, police dramas tend to subordinate realism, whether visual or sociological, to proven formulas of the crime melodrama.

But turn to the actual police departments where these shows are set and reality bites immediately. Sgt. Grace Ridley, former president of the Guardians, New York's black fraternal police order, complains that while African-Americans constitute 13.8 percent of the force, they occupy only 3.8 percent of the NYPD's command-level jobs (from captain on up). Chief Michael Markman, the NYPD's head of personnel, insists that the promotional process is fair and impartial but says that the tests are "very competitive" and, inevitably, "everybody doesn't make it." In Baltimore, where the Guardians' sister organization, the Vanguard Society, is headed by another black woman, Sgt. Teresa Cunningham, blacks make up 33 percent of the force but occupy just 18 percent of the command-level positions—a "blatant disparity," she says, though she is encouraged by the recent creation of a racially mixed municipal panel to study the problem. Sam Ringgold, director of public affairs for the Baltimore Department, who is also black, says that the discrepancies "are being looked into."

But other more intangible, unquantifiable grievances of black cops don't receive much attention on police dramas either. Reflecting wistfully on the interracial *esprit de corps* on cop shows, Sgt. Ridley contrasts the shows to what she sees as the harsh reality, a "lack of respect" for African-American officers "shown by our leaders, from the commissioner on down."

Former NYPD Commissioner Raymond Kelly feels that most police shows "just don't recognize that there are any racial tensions" on the force, though he had mild praise for the occasional "NYPD Blue" episode that touches on the issue.

James McDaniel, who plays Lt. Fancy, gives the show higher marks. He cites several subplots, including one in which his character administers an instant sensitivity session to Dennis Franz's Det. Sipowicz in a Harlem rib joint, and another in which he recovers the detective's stolen revolver and saves his job.

But the show's most trenchant examination of race relations came last January in a story that had Sipowicz subjecting a black suspect to poisonous ethnic slurs. The ensuing clash with Lt. Fancy was complex and compelling, and McDaniel's work helped earn him an Emmy nomination for best supporting actor (though only Franz, honored as best actor, took home an award).

"Homicide" has made a pass or two at the subject as well. In an episode whose main focus was the lurid murders of two young white women, Frank Pembleton (Andre Braugher), a black detective, tangles with a race-baiting white officer from another department and easily bests him.

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Both "Homicide" and "NYPD Blue" flirt with serious racial themes, but, with rare exceptions, prejudice is so easily vanquished that the audience would never guess that "racial tensions" in big-city police departments are the troubling issue that Kelly and others—both black and white—believe them to be. Moreover, police shows have seldom, if ever, addressed black complaints about the promotion process. Among newer cop shows, Dreamworks' lackluster "High Incidence," obviously designed to be L.A.'s answer to "NYPD Blue," has thus far ignored interracial problems on the force, as has the ultra-glitzy Don Johnson vehicle, "Nash Brides."

"Race is still the single most explosive issue that we as a country have to deal with," observes Dick Wolf, the producer of "Law and Order" and "New York Undercover," and a man known for confronting highly flammable racial topics. But the problems of black police officers don't seem to interest Wolf. Before the arrival of Lt. Van Buren a few seasons back, police work was an all-male, all-white occupation on "Law and Order," and, incredibly, racial factors have apparently never impeded Van Buren's professional advancement. "New York Undercover," a typically youth-oriented, skin-deep Fox Five entry, is set in a precinct in Harlem, where a remarkably p.c. team of two Puerto Ricans and a black, under the direction of a white woman commander, solve gaudy crimes throughout the city. In this fantasy world, problems like ethnic bias on the NYPD would only spoil the fun.

This evasiveness about racial subject matter runs counter to the bare-knuckled, "reality-based" ethos of cop shows where the goal is "captured reality," says Henry Bromell, executive producer of "Homicide." In addition, the shows employ experienced detectives as technical advisers.

Their public declarations notwithstanding, most TV executives and series producers prefer to treat racial topics in neutered form. George Gerbner, dean emeritus of the Annenberg Center for Communications at the University of Pennsylvania, has found that on television blacks in noncriminal roles are accorded a "favored position" and are shown as "more professional, more middle-class than whites." Significantly, says Gerbner, the black policeman "enforcing white law" is the minority figure white audiences most readily embrace.

Seeking the widest possible audience of all colors, television creates a parallel universe in which the majority of violent crimes, even at a Harlem precinct, are committed by white people. David Simon, author of *Homicide: A Year in the Killing Streets*, the superb true-crime account on which the TV series is based, and a crime reporter for the *Baltimore Sun*, points out that at least 90 percent of the homicide victims in Baltimore are black, as are their killers. But, says producer Bromell, the "literal truth" must be sacrificed because otherwise "zillions of people" across the country will be watching images that "completely reinforce...a stereotype."

Thus, "reality" becomes a highly mutable concept on police dramas. Crime statistics are manipulated like Play-Doh, and, in what Gerbner describes as "compensating values" (for each evil minority character, a virtuous one), the black policeman is elevated to the rank of Super-Cop, like the fiery, infallible Det. Pembleton on "Homicide." McDaniel, who once studied with Gerbner, fully supports the "favored position" concept for minorities. He argues that historically black actors "have been displayed in such an undesirable fashion" that they couldn't play a "drunken, carousing" (though ultimately heroic) figure like Sipowicz without evoking ugly stereotypes.

Maybe it's unfair to expect cop shows to confess the truth about race relations on the force or any other serious issue, driven as they are by the need to capture viewers, ratings, and advertisers. If they attempted to dramatize police work accurately, says Simon, "the only people watching would be a bunch of middle-aged homicide detectives drinking beer in some bar at 2 A. M." And the show would probably be off the air faster than Det. Pembleton solves a murder. □

Robert F. Moss, *the author of three books on film, has written for* New York Magazine, Cosmopolitan, *and the* New Republic.

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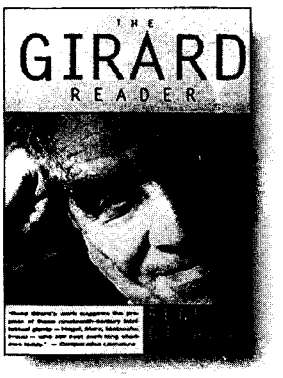

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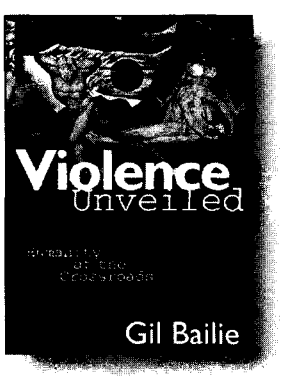

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Saint Jude: Double agent

Thank You, Saint Jude
Women's Devotions to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes
Robert A. Orsi
Yale University Press, $30, 303 pp.

James T. Fisher

Robert A. Orsi's 1985 study of Italian-American spirituality in an East Harlem parish, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, was one of the past decade's most influential works of American Catholic scholarship. Orsi blended ethnography, social history, and narrative theology so skillfully that popular, devotional Catholicism, a subject until then largely ignored by scholars, quickly achieved unprecedented crossover status as a legitimate field of inquiry, even for secular-minded academics. Orsi's description of the annual parish *festa* honoring Our Lady of Mount Carmel—its sights, sounds, and aromas—was so vivid the book became a kind of unofficial guide to the *festa* itself.

Orsi's new book, *Thank You, Saint Jude*, similarly begins in an urban, ethnic setting: the Mission of Our Lady of Guadalupe chapel, located in South Chicago "at the eastern edge of the area's Mexican community." In 1924, not long after the chapel was founded by a Chicago Jesuit, Cardinal-elect George Mundelein asked the Claretian Missionaries, a Spanish order, to assume responsibility for the mission to Chicago's Mexican-Americans. The most dedicated and energetic of those Claretians, Father Jaime Tort, cultivated a special devotion to Saint Jude Thaddeus who, despite his role as one of Christ's apostles, was nevertheless "so unfamiliar to North American Catholics that Father Tort could not find a statue of him among Chicago's many retailers of religious objects and was finally compelled to commission one based on a Spanish image (possibly the holy card) in his possession." Soon the streets surrounding the new church Father Tort had built in Saint Jude's honor were filled with supplicants. By 1937 the *Voice of Saint Jude* (now *U.S. Catholic*)—official organ of what had by then become Saint Jude's National Shrine—was receiving "thousands of letters *daily*."

Orsi's subject in *Thank You, Saint Jude* is not, however, a local site of Catholic devotionalism. Although the National Shrine of Saint Jude "is located *inside* a Mexican parish," Orsi argues that "local place was of no special significance to the shrine's devout," because "modern Catholic devotionalism took as easily to the airwaves and highways as it did to the ways of Madison Avenue." Jude's "territory of grace" quickly stretched from coast to coast. And yet, Orsi explains, "there was in fact, a way that place mattered to them a great deal," for the shrine assumed a uniquely *national* significance in an era—roughly the late 1920s to the middle '50s—when Catholic Americans, especially the "immigrants' daughters" who are the real subject of this fascinating book, struggled to reconcile the demands of their intimate devotional subculture and external forces of change.

Orsi's shift in focus from the ethnic particularism of *The Madonna of 115th Street* to the "oddly unencumbered, even disassociated" world of female devotions to Saint Jude yields a deeper engagement with themes from post-immigrant American Catholic history, especially the "gendered" nature of Catholic devotionalism. For while the National Shrine of Saint Jude was administered by men (and the *Voice of*

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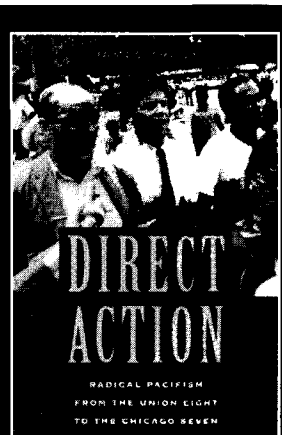

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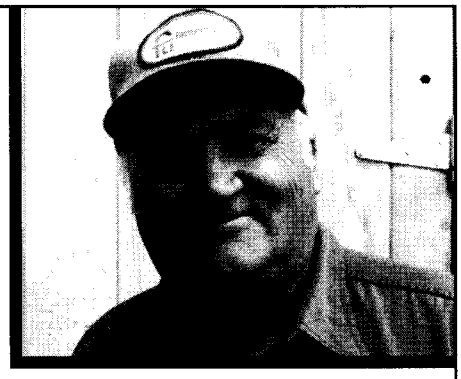

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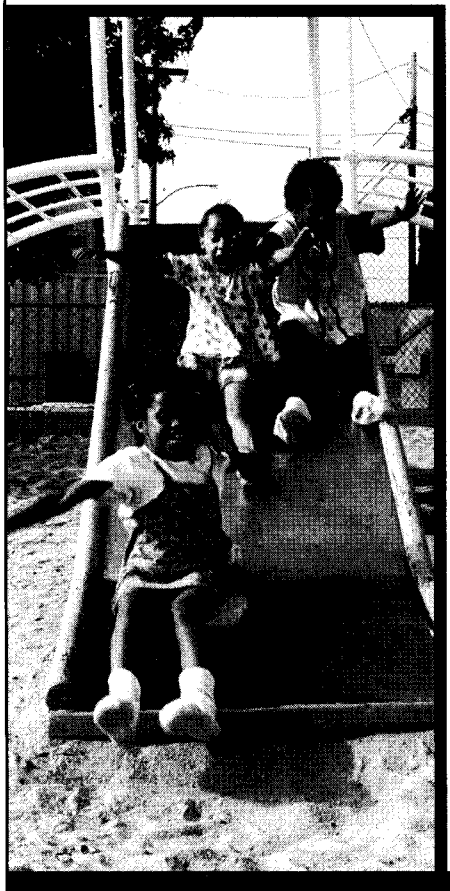

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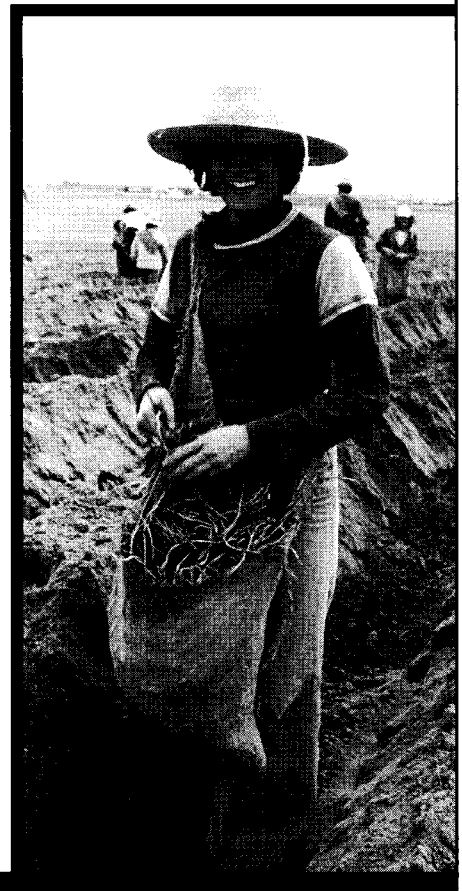

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Saint Jude was even edited by a fictional "Father Robert"), the overwhelming majority of devotees were women, who petitioned Saint Jude in the throes of hopeless personal situations that nearly always implicated men: real or imagined, absent or present.

"Here is my story," begins one of the many narrative petitions that are at the heart of the book. Whether facing a drunken husband, the pressures of combining work with childrearing, or an inconsolable loneliness, Orsi finds that Saint Jude's "devout had come to believe that there was absolutely nothing they could do, for themselves or for their stricken loved ones....The awful belief that God, too, had abandoned them in the dangerous moment, an oft-repeated sentiment among the Shrine's correspondents, was the most dreadful expression of this sense of a closed future." Out of the testimonies of female devotees—culled not just from the files of the *Voice of Saint Jude* but from personal interviews and statements recorded via a toll-free telephone number—Orsi has constructed a "social history of hopelessness" that subtly links "the historically contingent and the perennially human" to the prayer lives of his subjects. From the Great Depression to our own time—despite the scorn heaped on Saint Jude by postconciliar skeptics—"the prayers women made to Jude do disclose differences in the way they and the men around them experienced their times—and each other." As targets of "the American Catholic family romance" (that "wonderful, warm, sacred, perfect" fantasy Orsi locates at the heart of devotionalism) women were uniquely prone to fits of hopelessness that only a special saint could console.

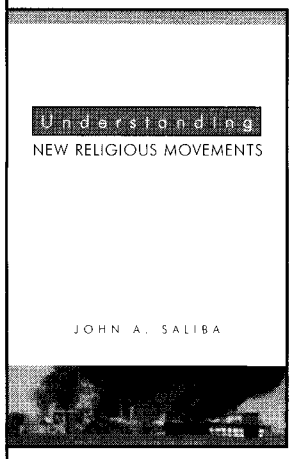
Rather than forcing a single interpretation onto his material, Orsi patiently traces the contours of an unfolding relationship between Jude and his female devotees, as they move from uneasy petitioners to authors of their own "narratives of grace." "Women reported that once they had entered the world of the devotion they no longer felt overwhelmed by circumstances; composing their stories they composed themselves." In turn they became fervent champions of Saint Jude "in fulfillment of the devotional promise," and achieved an authority denied them in their everyday lives.

Orsi's respect for his subjects is as clear ("they transformed our conversations into narratives of grace, too," he writes of his interviewees) as his conclusions are ambivalent. "The central political fact of devotionalism is that while it was ostensibly made for women, directed at their hearts and purses, it was made against them, too." Since within the devotional subculture women were "responsible for everything but unable to do anything," they "turned to subterfuge, self-delusion, and magical omnipotence. They entered a regressive relationship with a male protector who filled the spaces vacated by others they had depended on (their fathers and mothers, husbands, priests, and doctors) and brought them deep satisfactions, but at the cost of an authentic engagement with their circumstances and of the renunciation of their adult selves."

Understanding

NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

JOHN A. SALIBA



From Jonestown to Waco, from the Unification Church to Scientology, new religious movements — or "cults," as they are often and pejoratively called — are constantly in the news. Few books from a Christian background are anything but hostile to the vast expansion of these new ways of expressing religious sentiment. But *Understanding New Religious Movements* is different. John A. Saliba, who has been writing on new religious movements since 1976, here offers a dispassionate, balanced analysis of new religions.

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While some readers may object to the blend of cultural studies and therapeutic discourse that suffuses *Thank You, Saint Jude*, it is not Orsi but his subjects who—long before the self-help movement became "fashionable"—spoke eloquently if simply in the language of healing and recovery as a spontaneous response to the saving intercession of Saint Jude in their lives. Orsi himself concludes that Saint Jude was "too volatile" to be confined within any of the categories of gender studies. "Inflected by desire, Jude was not a stable agent of the culture; born in culture and history, he was not a completely trustworthy ally of the self. Figures like Jude are cultural double agents, constituting and destabilizing both culture and self." Sometimes ambivalence is a methodological escape hatch, but in *Thank You, Saint* Jude Robert Orsi has woven a finely textured narrative that conveys a real fidelity to the spiritual history of "the immigrants' daughters" who rescued a saint from obscurity. □

James T. Fisher *teaches at Saint Louis University. He is the author of* Dr. America: The Lives of Thomas A. Dooley, 1927–61, *to be published next year by the University of Massachusetts Press.*

THE JOURNEY SO FAR

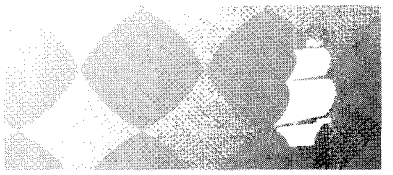
Miles to Go
A Personal History of Social Policy
Daniel Patrick Moynihan
Harvard University Press, $22.95, 288 pp.

Alan Wolfe

Daniel Patrick Moynihan has been right so often one wonders why he needed to write a book to tell us so. Moynihan is a precious national asset, a rare, if not simply unique, combination of legislator and intellectual, someone with the brain power to understand a problem and the political power to find a solution. On top of all that, he has a sense of humor, a tragic view of life, and an unusual grasp of reality. All of which makes me even more puzzled that he would take time from his busy schedule to toot his horn in ways that demean, rather than dignify, the stature he deserves.

This is not to suggest that readers should avoid *Miles to Go*. On the contrary, this is one of the most insightful accounts of contemporary politics available, stuffed with Moynihan's wit, passion, and prophecy. Although confusing to read—some of it is written as a book, some of it was previously published, some is page-filler—the long introduction alone makes the book worthwhile. Here Moynihan recounts his version of the two great battle's of President Bill Clinton's first term, health care and welfare. As chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and as an astute commentator on both subjects for three decades, one would have expected Moynihan to become a close ally of the president. Yet the senator wound up to the "right" of Bill Clinton on health care and to the "left" on welfare, in both cases offering advice which the White House chose to ignore.

Moynihan's analysis of the utter defeat of health-care reform will someday be treated as a case study of all that can go wrong in politics. Quoting from previously confidential documents, he shows how the president's task force, in its infinite wisdom, decided that America had too many specialists and that the number of residencies available at hospitals should be restricted to 110 percent of the graduates of American medical schools, thereby keeping out, not only immigrant doctors, but Americans who went abroad for their medical training. Whether these were good ideas is irrel-



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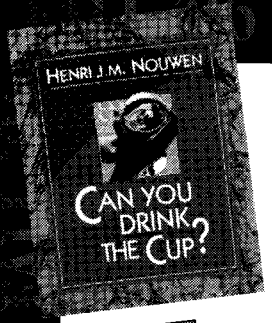

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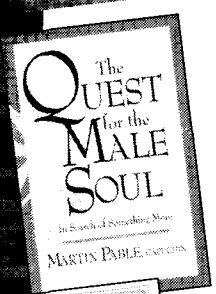

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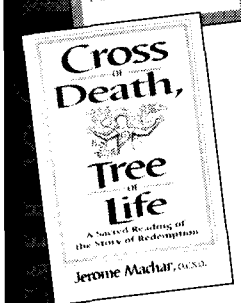

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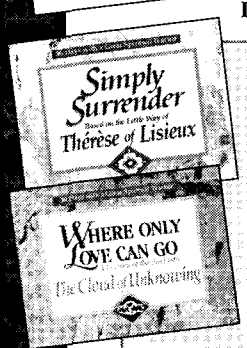

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evant—although Moynihan persuades me that they were bad ones. What is astonishing, and what really makes the senator's veins stand out, is the sheer contempt for democracy shown by Ira Magaziner and other policy planners. Had the administration been content with near-universal coverage, Moynihan concludes, we would now have a system of national health insurance. Instead, as he emphatically reminds his readers, no health-care reform bill was ever reported to the House floor.

One would love a similarly biting analysis of the debates over welfare reform, especially because, on that issue, Moynihan played the role of critic and policy advocate, not the role of legislator. (What changes one election can work). The senator's eloquence and passion in defense of the vulnerable will long be remembered, but at least this reader is troubled by Moynihan's failure to tell us why he took the path of prophet. As one of the many Americans who have ambivalent feelings about welfare—I believe that everyone deserves help when in need, financed by taxes and paid by government, but that long-term dependency is such a demeaning state that everything should be done to encourage people to get out of it—I could understand, if not necessarily agree with, President Clinton's decision to sign the bill. All the more reason to hear an argument against Clinton's decision, and who better to make the offer than Moynihan? But he does not do it, at least not in this book. It would have been an even better book if he had.

Miles to Go includes two of Moynihan's classic essays, which are not only reprinted, but which the senator revisits and brings up to date. "The Professionalization of Reform," first published in 1965, told the story of how reformers, who often speak in the language of altruism, came to have a self-interest in the expansion of government. "Defining Deviancy Down," presented to the American Sociological Association in 1993, argued that conduct which in previous times might have been considered deviant, was now considered normal; the paper, when published in the *American Scholar*, caused a furor of reaction, most of which Moynihan recounts.

It is this tendency of Moynihan to comment on Moynihan that seems so out of place. Parts of *Miles to Go* read like a compilation of press clippings, as if someone on the senator's staff plowed through Nexis only for the purpose of giving the reader a sense of how right the senator always is. And the senator himself, although stating modestly at one point that he is not a very good social scientist, cannot help noting how well his earlier pieces stand up and how wrong the other guy tends to be. How do you tell so successful a man that he need not be so insecure?

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Moynihan's insecurity is not just a stylistic quirk, alas. One reason to admire the man, and to want to read everything he writes, is that when Moynihan speaks, ideology does not. It is so rare in this ideological age to find someone you can trust. But can you trust someone who puts not ideology, but himself, first? The effect of Moynihan's self-importance is to raise the question of whether he is self-serving. And once doubts begin to creep into the reader's mind about whether Moynihan is grinding an axe, the prodigious effort he has made to be trustworthy begins to crumble.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan has written many books, and surely we will be hearing from him again. I hope his next one contains all the wondrous gems of this one without the unnecessary coarseness. □

Alan Wolfe *teaches political science and sociology at Boston University and is the author of* Marginalized in the Middle *(University of Chicago Press).*

WAS MARY A WOMAN?

Mary through the Centuries
Her Place in the History of Culture
Jaroslav Pelikan
Yale University Press, $25, 260 pp.

Sara Maitland

I am not certain whether this book was given its title to match Pelikan's earlier work *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (Yale, 1985), or in the hope of attracting a wider readership, but either way it was unfortunate. I spent the first half of my reading fretting irritably at Pelikan's extremely narrow understanding of culture. It was only when I realized that the author was intending something altogether different from what this title implies that I began to relax. It should have been called *Mary through the Centuries: Her Role in the Development of Doctrine*, but that is altogether less appealing!

In fact Pelikan has written an accessible defense of two genuinely interesting themes. The first is that Marian doctrine was always developed as a test-case (or consequence) of other more primary doctrines, usually Christological. He does not cite two ancient Marian slogans—"He who is not Marian is Arian" and "What we believe of Our Lady, we hope for ourselves"—but these do in fact underpin his general position. To give a true account of the "double nature" (the true humanity and full divinity) of Jesus it is necessary to define rather precisely the ontology of his mother.

The second theme—more interesting to me, but less detailed here—is that the development of Mariology was "imagination-led." It arose in the work of artists and in popular devotion, so that academic theology was justifying a pre-existing faith, rather than worked out by abstract theory and "fed down" to the devout. It is not clear whether Pelikan thinks this is particular to Mariology, or whether it is the case with all doctrine and he is using Mary as an example. Given the extent that this flies in the face of what so many of "the faithful" (especially perhaps Roman Catholics) now *feel*—that our theology is predominantly handed down from on high—a book directed at the lay reader, as this one is, could have helpfully clarified and illustrated this point further.

Within his context Pelikan proceeds in a business-like and systematic way. He begins with a useful explanation of typological biblical interpretation which so expanded the available texts on Mary from the measly few in the Gospels to large swaths of the Old Testament. After

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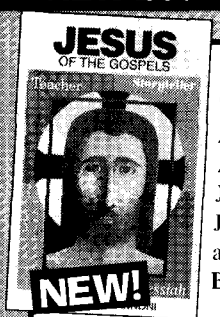

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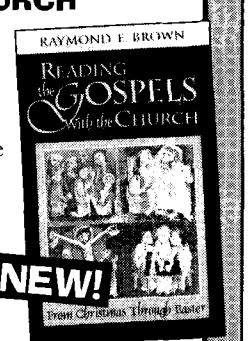

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that there are fifteen chapters, organized chronologically, which treat some of the major Marian "titles"—from Second Eve to Queen of Heaven—and explain their development within the theological context of their time.

Mary through the Centuries is business-like but it is not objective. Pelikan is a Marian apologist. Since I see nothing shameful in this (I'm heavily Marian Christian myself), I wish he could have brought himself to say so more explicitly and earlier. His fifth chapter, for instance, is on Mary as "the Heroine of the Qur'an." Since I am one of the many whom he rightly criticizes for abysmal ignorance of this holy text, I was surprised and fascinated by his account of the positive and central view of Mary within it. However, when I reached chapter 11 on Mary within the reformed traditions—of which I know slightly more—I realized that he was very specifically extracting from Protestant theologies the "best case" for Mary, rather than a broad overview of their understanding of her role. This rather undermined my confidence in her importance in Islam!

However, the real problem with this hidden bias is that it leads Pelikan to "cheat." Although he allows himself a whole chapter on the Assumption and its dogmatization in 1950, he still claims that he is not going to address twentieth-century thinking about Mary. What this means of course is that he can dodge all post-Freudian, modern biblical, post-modernist, psycholinguistic, and most significantly all feminist critiques of Mariology.

This means not needing to admit to any patriarchal bias in Marian thinking, and not having to address historical research which links Mary with the pagan goddess rites. I am uncertain why a Marian apologist has so much difficultly with the idea that images of Mary might be drawn from wider sources than the councils of the church while simultaneously trying to argue that Marianism was generated from popular devotion, but Pelikan clearly wants to dismiss the idea out of hand.

Although annoying, and limiting, this is inevitable. An odd thing about this book is that in 260 pages about someone who is known primarily as a mother, there is a peculiar absence of *gender*, of any sense that women have any particular relationship to "culture"; or that Mary's *female-ness* had any relevance. Pelikan seems sublimely unaware of gender as an issue. For example, on page 178 he lists officially approved apparitions of the Virgin. In all of them except Guadalupe at least some of the visionaries were *women*. Even if feminist theology has not proven its ubiquitous significance yet (I believe it has), surely Marian studies is one place where, on Pelikan's own principle of bottom-up doctrinal development, it should be most eagerly welcomed.

To conclude, for those who want a sympathetic technical summary of the history of "official" Marian theology (and more of us need this than we would admit) this is a handy guide. Those inspired by the title and looking for a wide-ranging cultural reading of Mary would probably do better with, for example, Marina Warner's *Alone of All Her Sex*.

Pelikan has written an interesting book, but severely limited and in a depressing way rather old fashioned. *Mary's Place in the History of Culture* published in 1996 and *no* mention of Christmas cards, Mothers' Day, the abortion-rights debate, or even Madonna—I ask you! □

Sara Maitland *is a novelist and theologian. Her* Angel Maker: The Collected Short Stories *has just been published by Henry Holt.*

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WHAT WILSON MISSES

When Work Disappears
The World of the New Urban Poor
William Julius Wilson
Alfred A. Knopf, $26, 322 pp.

Don Wycliff

William Julius Wilson's last book, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, published in the mid 1980s, was a conscious attempt to rebut the thesis advanced by Charles Murray in his then-current *Losing Ground*. Against Murray's argument that welfare had created the so-called underclass, Wilson argued convincingly that what really had done it was the disappearance of jobs, especially well-paying jobs in mass-production industries.

Wilson's new book is also, in part, a rebuttal of another Murray book, *The Bell Curve*, which Murray and the late Richard Herrnstein published two years ago. Murray-Herrnstein put back into play the notion that low intelligence, probably genetic in origin, accounts for the failure to thrive of African-Americans as a group. Against that notion, Wilson offers the argument that it is unemployment—persistent, concentrated, and on a community-wide scale—that produces the deviant behavior of so many black ghetto residents, who are then taken as representative in some way of African-Americans as a whole.

"Given the reemergence of the discussion concerning the importance of genetic endowment," Wilson writes, "it is urgent that social scientists once again emphasize, for public policy purposes, the powerful and complex role of the social environment in shaping the life experiences of inner-city ghetto residents."

In a very real sense, *When Work Disappears* is an effort to examine and describe the souls of certain black folk—those who populate inner-city neighborhoods where, in Wilson's telling, the central reality has come to be not just poverty, but mind-numbing, spirit-killing, community-destroying joblessness.

Unfortunately, that's an assignment for a novelist or a filmmaker or a good journalist, not for an academic writing in the turgid, polysyllabic prose of a scholarly journal. Even the occasional extended quotations of actual ghetto residents—compiled by members of Wilson's research team at the University of Chicago, where he taught for twenty-four years before moving to Harvard last summer—cannot enliven the author's leaden sociologist's prose.

Maybe more important, most of what is in this book will seem like old news to any conscientious reader of a decent

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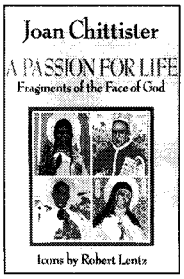

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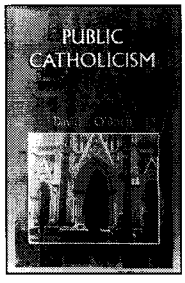

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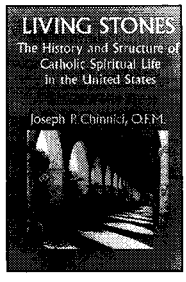

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daily newspaper. To be sure, Wilson and his researchers have compiled an impressive body of data, much of it the result of extensive field work and interviews with residents of inner-city Chicago neighborhoods. But in the end, they found nothing more than what many journalists and documentary-makers have discovered and reported in newspaper series on "the underclass" over the last dozen or so years. That is, that while many things characterize life in urban ghettos—rampant poverty, racial segregation, extreme violence—unemployment is perhaps the dominant reality. And as the nuns used to tell us in grade school, "idle hands are the devil's workshop." To quickly summarize Wilson's analysis: The "new urban poor" are those residents of segregated inner-city neighborhoods of highly concentrated poverty where "a substantial majority of individual adults are either unemployed or have dropped out of the labor force altogether." This alienation from the world of work has several causes. The main one is what Wilson calls industrial restructuring: the disappearance of job-intensive manufacturing industries of the sort that required more brawn than brains but still paid a decent wage of the sort one could raise a family on. Others include the decline of unions and government policies that enabled people and companies to flee the cities for suburbia. To some extent, the old manufacturing jobs have been replaced by service jobs. But these, when they are not out of reach physically (that is, in the suburbs), are often out of reach in terms of the educational qualifications they call for, or because they appeal more to women than to men. (While everyone suffers from inner-city joblessness, men especially suffer.)

The ghetto culture of joblessness plays havoc with everything—the ability of parents to raise children properly; the peace of the community; the ambitions of adults; the ability of children to see a future. Most important, it fosters the sense, among individuals and in communities, that they have no control over their lives. In short, it demoralizes people.

In our current age of economic anxiety, that shouldn't be hard for anyone to understand or empathize with. But as Wilson points out, Americans are more inclined to hold individuals personally and morally culpable for being unemployed or on welfare than they are to blame social or economic conditions. All the more so when the individuals being judged are black.

The first half of *When Work Disappears*—the analysis—is Wilson's windup. His pitch comes in the second half, when he offers policy prescriptions for the plight of the jobless inner-cities. Since Wilson is one of President Bill Clinton's favorite interpreters of racial and urban problems, it's a fair assumption that these prescriptions already have been digested at the White House.

Like the analysis, they are familiar. They include job-training programs, school-to-work transition programs, universal health insurance, and a system of low-wage public jobs to replace wel-

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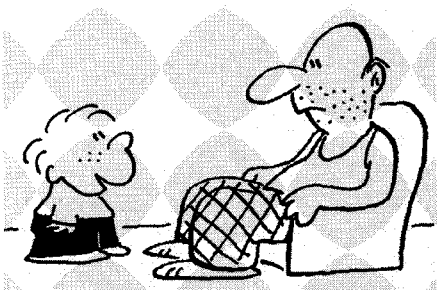

"I want to follow in your footsteps, Dad. What kind of work are you out of?"

fare (although Wilson would not approve of the recently passed welfare "reform" legislation). Wilson is not fond of "race-specific" policies, for they have no staying power. To win sustained public support, policies need to be race-neutral, crafted to serve everyone, with blacks, who generally are among the most disadvantaged, benefiting along with everyone else who may qualify.

What was most disappointing to me was my sense that Wilson, for ideological reasons, refuses to accept and follow-up on the implications of some of his findings. Two examples will suffice.

Wilson recognizes that immigration has been a major factor in the inability of inner-city black men to find work and in the diminution of their wages over the last quarter-century. Yet his policy recommendations contain no mention of immigration policy. In this he is like most black political leaders, who are reluctant to call for tighter controls on immigration to improve the economic lot of African-Americans.

And in an observation of special significance to Catholics, Wilson writes this in his discussion of education, race, and employment for inner-city youth:

> The employers who volunteered information on the schools they recruited from usually mentioned Catholic schools or those from Chicago's largely white Northwest Side communities. Although employees recruited from the Catholic schools were more likely to be white, black students from Catholic schools were also viewed more favorably than those from the public schools. For example, an employer at a suburban department store pointed out that although minority students fail the skills test more frequently than white students "the minorities that go to parochial school test as well as the whites. They come here dressed as well, and this is a totally different act. Now this is a difference that I can spot, is between your parochial school and your public school."

The new administration of Chicago's public school system has taken that sort of testimony to heart and is borrowing unabashedly from the Archdiocese of Chicago in restructuring the city's schools. Wilson, however, saw no reason to mine this nugget for his recommendations about education for inner-city children. There is none so blind as he who will not see. □

Don Wycliff, *a frequent contributor to* Commonweal, *is editorial page editor of the* Chicago Tribune.

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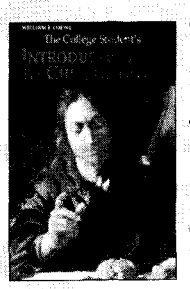

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Same Places, Same Things
Tim Gautreaux
St. Martin's Press, $20.95, 211 pp.

Rand Richards Cooper

To judge by Tim Gautreaux's fiction, Thoreau's famous dictum had it half wrong: true, the mass of men do lead lives of desperation; but they are hardly quiet about it. Consider this from "License to Steal," in which an unemployed, hard-drinking workingman wakes one morning to discover that his wife has gone, taking the car—and her paycheck—with her:

> Curtis put on his brown vinyl bedroom slippers and walked down to the corner to use the pay phone outside the Mudbug Café to call his son, Nookey, who worked at a sausage plant in Pochatoula.
>
> "What do you want?" Nookey yelled over the whir of a dozen grinders. "I got a pig to do here about the size of a Oldsmobile."

There's nothing hidden about the miseries on display in *Same Places, Same Things*, a collection of stories set in the rural South. A locomotive engineer named Jesse guzzles a half pint of whisky, then drives a hundred cars of propane and vinyl chloride through the Louisiana night. A stoical well-pump repairman discovers a farmer dead by a freak accident and a bored and flirtatious wife who ominously doesn't much seem to care. A widowed strawberry farmer left to raise his infant granddaughter when the girl's mother dies in a plane crash gives her shotgun shells to play with as toys.

It's hard to know whether to find such doubtful men and dire predicaments funny, scary, or pathetic. These are lives harshly circumscribed by poverty, under-education, and alcohol, and Gautreaux inspects them sympathetically, but with a rueful, hardscrabble humor. When Leblanc, the strawberry farmer, needing help with the baby, undertakes to head out to a bar woman-hunting, he showers, shaves, and reaches for a green bottle on the bathroom shelf, only to slap his face with foot liniment his late wife bought years before. Gautreaux's antiheroes prove magnificently adept at failure.

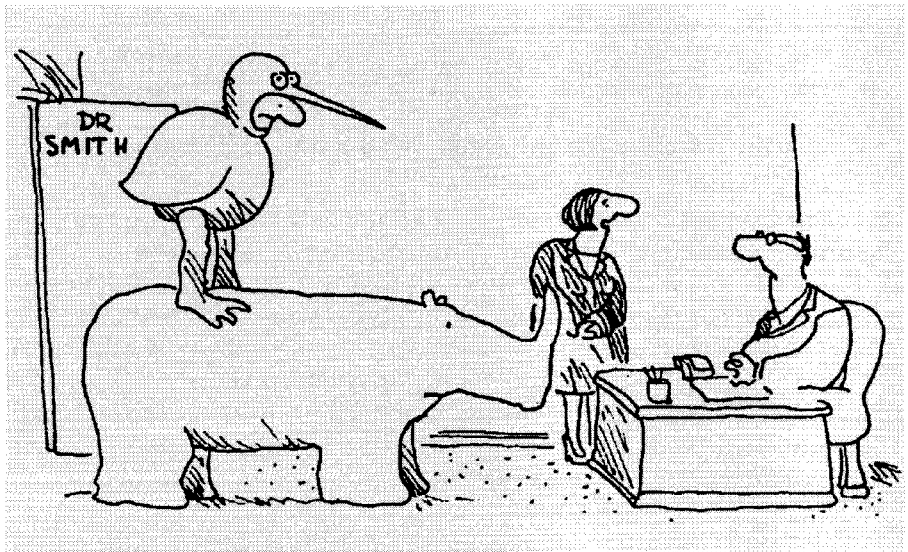
Theirs is a world in which work—when it can be found—alternates petty humiliations with spectacular mishaps. *Same Places, Same Things* contains the most detailed writing about workplace accidents ever found outside of an OSHA report; it's a chilling study of how vehicles and heavy machinery get converted into lethal weapons. Tugboats sink; gravel trucks race downhill toward stopped schoolbuses; the train carrying deadly chemicals leaps off the track, igniting a whole town.

Carelessness and hard drinking feature prominently in these wrecks, along with a paradoxical sense of invulnerability. Habituated to irrelevance, unable to imagine being able to make a dent in the world, Gautreaux's protagonists have been made dangerous by their own deep impotence. "The sense of being invisible made Jesse think he could not be taken seriously, which was why he never voted, hardly ever renewed his driver's license, and paid attention in church only once a year at revival time." These stories shrewdly trace the roots of irresponsibility, not to a heedless assertion of self, but rather its opposite, a literal lack of self-image. With special acuteness Gautreaux captures the stunned disbelief of little men as they are precipitated, horribly and against their own wishes, into mattering.

Tim Gautreaux's prose strikes few notes, but strikes them true and clear. There's the terse descriptive vigor of "Died and Gone to Vegas," a Stephen Crane-like fable of liars' poker on a dredging ship anchored in the Mississippi:

> The steel door next to the starboard triple-expansion engine opened, letting in a wash of frigid air around the day-fireman, pilot, deckhand, and welder who came into the big room cursing and clapping the cold out of their clothes. Through the door the angry whitecaps of Southwest Pass raced down the Mississippi, bucking into the tarnished Gulf sky.

More often, the order of the day is rueful humor. Boisterous farm idioms serve



"It's my husband, Doctor. He thinks he's a tick bird."

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his characters' steady habit of lamentation ("We didn't know no more about raising children than a goat knows about flying"). One hears tones of Flannery O'Connor; but Gautreaux is a little less mordant, his humor more doleful than baleful.

> ...His grandson was living with him again, complaining of the evils of capitalism, eating his food, using all the hot water in the mornings....Lenny would never hold a job because he suffered from inborn disrespect for anybody engaged in business. Everybody was stupid. All businessmen were crooks. At twenty-five his grandson had the economic sense of a sixty-year-old Russian peasant.

Unlike O'Connor, Gautreaux doesn't make you feel his characters necessarily deserve their lot in life; it's enough that they're stuck with it.

These hefty portions of rural working-class life are served up with a distinct Cajun spice. The men in *Same Places, Same Things* have names like Robichaux and Lejeune; they sit around all night playing *bourre*, then wake in the morning for two links of *boudin* and a pot of grits; when something is creepy they get *les frissons*. In bars on their way to the plant to look for work they stop to snack on pickled eggs and pigs lips. Living hell is getting the car radio stuck on a public radio station, where the soprano, one remarks, "sounds like a tomcat hung up in a fan belt." Armadillos forage in the kitchen. It feels like a foreign country—one steeped in haplessness, where even the towns, places like Gumwood and Grand Crapaud, sound like insults—and the inhabitants know it. Curtis's son Nookey explains why his mother left: "Said she was tired of living in Louisiana with somebody didn't bring home no money. Said she wanted to move to the United States."

Once upon a time, regionalism wasn't merely an aspect of American culture; it was our culture. It is now beating a rapid retreat, driven relentlessly by Walmart, video megachains, the OJ trial, and a host of other forces which exert a profoundly homogenizing influence on our literal and imaginative landscapes, and on our language, too. "I ain't heard nobody around here talk like you in a while," says a woman in one of Gautreaux's stories, to a man all the way from distant Missouri. Robustly local in its settings, speech, and folkways, *Same Places, Same Things* creates a vividly realized milieu. To the characters busy making a mess of their lives there, Tim Gautreaux offers neither transcendence nor escape, merely the comforts of home—sloppy sinners, yes, but sinners in their own world. For the rest of us, these stories make for welcome relief from the blandness of McWorld; they bring reassuring evidence of the continuing existence of places away from the big place where, increasingly, we all live. □

Rand Richards Cooper *is the author of two books of stories,* The Last to Go *(Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich) and* Big As Life *(The Dial Press). He lives in Hartford, Connecticut.*

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OUT OF IRELAND

Angela's Ashes
A Memoir
Frank McCourt
Scribner, $23, 358 pp.

Thomas Deignan

The moment of the memoir has arrived, or so the *New York Times Magazine* announced in a recent issue. From the dark familial odysseys of Mary Gordon and Mary Karr, to the drinking lives of Pete Hammill and Caroline Knapp, to the *ad nauseam* absurdity of Dennis Rodman, writers and would-be writers are celebrating selfhood with voluminous success. In the issue devoted to the memoir, the level of suffering heaped upon the reader, the jockeying for empathy and sympathy were nearly unbearable, now that tragic dysfunction and self-pity have evidently superseded the *Bildungsroman* models set forth by Rousseau and old Ben Franklin.

This century, Joyce and Proust dumped their lives into their fiction, but left it to the biographers to patch together the shards of heart and soul strewn throughout their work. In scanning the landscape of contemporary autobiography, one can't help but feel the nudge of our confessional, talk-show culture elbowing up the intellectual food chain, perhaps suggesting that the novel is no longer immediate enough to transmit maximum emotional impact, especially in our increasingly cyber-paced age.

Frank McCourt's memoir, *Angela's Ashes*, is certainly contemporary in its vivid, unflinching portrait of human suffering. Born to Irish immigrants in Depression-era Brooklyn, McCourt's mother (Angela) and father can eke out only a dirty, pathetic life in America, so they return to family in Ireland.

> People everywhere brag and whimper about the woes of their early years, but nothing can compare with the Irish version: the poverty; the shiftless loquacious alcoholic father; the pious, defeated mother moaning by the fire; pompous priests; bullying schoolmasters; the English and the terrible things they did to us for eight hundred years.

This is one of the rare passages where McCourt, a retired New York City high school (Stuyvesant) teacher, allows his present-day self to intrude into the narrative and stake a claim in a very crowded field. And while it is perhaps unfair to knock a memoir for evoking stereotypes, the travails McCourt describes are, by now, quite familiar. The voice he

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writes in—an eternal child, in the present tense—prohibits a tempered acknowledgment of the nearly mythic quality of these grim memories. As a consequence, *Angela's Ashes* can at times seem more a weepy compendium of "Irishness" than a slice of a single, examined life.

None of which diminishes the raw power of McCourt's story, however. "I wonder how I managed to survive at all," he writes early on. And by the time McCourt is nineteen, we appreciate the awesome desperation in this seemingly hackneyed statement. A baby sister dies in Brooklyn, and two more brothers die in Ireland. Young girls he falls in love with die as well.

McCourt himself is beset with afflictions brought on by the starvation and squalor in his family's lice-infested Limerick slum, including a bout of typhoid and the "scabby eyes" of conjunctivitis. "I'm going to die and I don't care," he says while a priest administers extreme unction, later admitting that he envies a friend "whose relations are dropping one by one" because "he gets a week off from school [and people will give him] money and sweets for his sorrow."

Death is not only physical and familial in McCourt's Limerick, but religious and political as well. "The [school] master says it's a glorious thing to die for Faith and Dad says it's a glorious thing to die for Ireland and I wonder if there's anyone in the world who would like us to live."

There is certainly a Joycean ring here. But McCourt's wicked schoolmasters, his father's "Irish thing" (drinking), the provincial bigotry and patriarchy of the West of Ireland, the ubiquity and banality of death, while vivid, also beg for some authorial perspective. What is most moving in this book—from the romance and humor to the sex and death—is depicted with a hushed subtlety. The most complex characters tend to be peripheral ones, who compress McCourt's themes into a dense line or two. As his intellectual aspirations grow, for example, Frank listens to Shakespeare through the window of the only home on the lane with a radio. When the owner repeats the oft-heard assertion that the Great Bard "must have been an Irishman," the great wonders beyond Limerick viscerally collide with the fierce provincial nationalism that surrounds McCourt.

The portrait of any fledgling artist must outline the journey toward intellectual enlightenment. And for an Irish writer, the heavy blanket of Catholicism, and the gleaming morning sunlight of America across the Atlantic, must be markers on that journey.

McCourt's handling of religion can seem stock, but there are quiet deaths of faith among the flock which bite. "Mam says sure God is good for someone somewhere but He hasn't been seen lately in the lanes of Limerick." And yet, it should be noted that much of the aid the desperate McCourts receive comes from local religious authorities. The permanence of religion in Irish life is tempered by the need to view it skeptically. Damnation, salvation, and mundane faithlessness all

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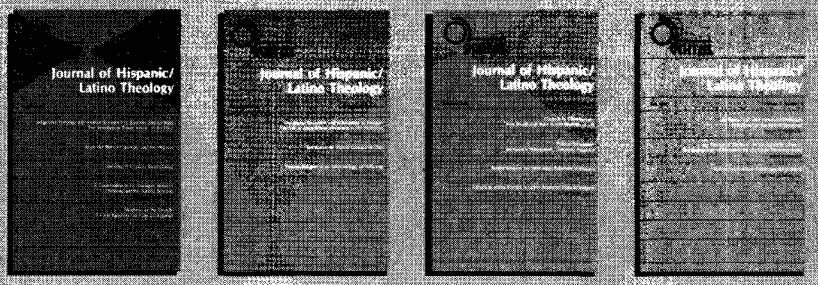

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are doled out in equal portions.

But teen-age Frank is most smitten by America. Hollywood's cowboy and Cagney films quench his parched mind, and, with a quick hand, and odd jobs working for the contemptuous upper classes (which also spur him on to hone his writing skills), McCourt collects enough money to head for New York. And there is a wonderful final scene, involving a priest, a lonely wife, and an unanswered knock on a bedroom door, which serves as an epiphanic bridge from Ireland to America, from McCourt's youth to his adulthood.

The rather stoic tone of *Angela's Ashes* aside, there are moments of gentle revelation, poignant ambiguity, and tragic brilliance that great novelists would kill to have written—the destruction of the McCourts' house because too much wood was broken off for the fire; or Frank and his brother succumbing to the irresistible temptation to try on their father's fake teeth; or McCourt's assertion that "I think my father is like the Holy Trinity with three people in him," the gentle morning man with the paper, the evening storyteller, and the drunk.

"[T]he happy childhood is hardly worth your while," McCourt writes, acknowledging the climate of competitive bleakness which seems to have descended upon memoirists. But *Angela's Ashes* asks not for therapeutic catharsis or closure, despite the pain of McCourt's youth and the forbearance manifested in his escape. Both lucid and harrowing at his best, McCourt is aware that there are no easy solutions in a world where, as a doctor tells his family, sometimes "God ask[s] for too much, too damn much." □

Thomas Deignan, *who reviews books regularly for the* Irish Voice, *also teaches American Culture Studies at Bowling Green State University in Ohio.*

'IN RETROSPECT,' REDUX

The Living and the Dead
Robert McNamara and Five Lives of a Lost War
Paul Hendrickson
Alfred A. Knopf, $30, 427 pp.

James J. Uebbing

By the time Robert McNamara got around to beating his breast over Vietnam with the publication of his memoir (*In Retrospect*, Times Books) last year, he might well have forgotten what vilification felt like. During the months that followed, he may have wondered if he had ever truly known it before. The book was his first public discussion of Vietnam in nearly twenty years and, like most political memoirs, it revealed a good deal less than it was given credit for. McNamara's allowance that "we were wrong" in the prosecution of the war was almost certainly intended as something more than a statement of the obvious, and might even have amounted to an apology. It is hard to say. But it served nicely as a red flag to any who still had strong feelings on the subject, and it turned out that there were quite a few.

To Paul Hendrickson, over at the *Washington Post*, "what *In Retrospect* proved, probably beyond any publisher's cash-register dreams, was that Vietnam hadn't gone away, it was only hiding, seething under the surface." Hendrickson had written a series of articles about McNamara for the *Post* in 1984, shortly before the Westmoreland-CBS libel trial, and seems to have conceived the idea of a book around that time. Although McNamara had been cooperative at first, the interviews quickly ceased and the calls gradually took longer and longer to be returned and even the letters became unhelpful and curt after a while. Hendrickson managed without him and, after twelve years of interviews with more than five hundred sources, felt safe in going to print on his own. "Except," he says, "I would still like to talk to Robert McNamara."

From the very start, Hendrickson tries for a broad and dramatic approach. "His wife wasn't drinking milk with her Scotch in the hope that her stomach might hurt a little less—not then. A man bearing a child hadn't set himself on fire below his Pentagon window—not yet." The opening lines make it pretty clear what the author has in mind, and his attempt to locate McNamara somewhere between the realms of public and private life is at once arresting, crude, and vivid. "What is being glimpsed here is a soul that's been so consciously hemmed in and boundaried all day."

We know a good deal of this already, of course. McNamara the Whiz Kid, pulling numbers out of the air at press conferences, quoting body-counts off the top of his head: it was part of the mythology of Vietnam long before the war ended, and Hendrickson picks it up with ease. "I think of Robert McNamara," he says, "as a kind of postwar technocratic hubristic fable. He was an extraordinarily impressive person, almost a new Adam, who abused his trust, and knows he did, and has spent the rest of his life paying for it."

Perhaps. Americans, by and large, lack the tragic sense in their historical imaginings, and we have always tried hard to plot the orbit of our national consciousness along the poles of good and evil. More venerable societies might not have found the experience of the Vietnam War nearly so unsettling, in terms of national identity, as we did. This is not a question of cynicism or sophistication; it is more a matter of faith. For the ancient biblical understanding of history as the arena of Providence, in which justice is sought as a kind of divine equilibrium, has always found a deep resonance with the American soul and persists even to this day.

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Hendrickson himself proceeds largely out of this tradition and, although he does not actually speak of guilt or innocence *per se*, leaves little doubt that his task has more to do with judgment than intelligence. There is nothing merely anecdotal, then, in the accounts of McNamara worrying about power-window motors at church on Sunday, or opening his Christmas gifts with a notebook beside him so that he could record who gave him what. There is a helpful epigraph from Jung, in case we miss the point, concerning the psychic traumas induced by an "artificial personality." And there is the history of the war itself, which is unveiled through the recollections of five witnesses: a marine corporal, an army nurse, the son of a South Vietnamese politician, the widow of the Quaker pacifist who immolated himself outside the Pentagon, and a Martha's Vineyard artist who once assaulted McNamara aboard the Wood's Hole ferry.

It is hard to say what all of this adds up to in the end, although the spectacle of discrete lives connected through fate and circumstance—Hendrickson himself comes into the picture as an unhappy seminarian in 1965 reading a *Life* article about the corporal's squadron—seems calculated to point to McNamara as an agent, if not the actual source, of their misfortunes. To some degree he was, of course. But it is striking how few of the five (the artist excepted) seem to have thought in such terms. For them, as for most of us, it was the war itself that was the disaster. McNamara himself is off the map.

McNamara's pronouncement, in one of his last conversations with Hendrickson, that "the real history of Vietnam hasn't been written yet" is as obvious and unhelpful, in its way, as his admission that "we were wrong." It is true for all that, however, and in the end Hendrickson can't be said to have contributed much more than a counter-memoir to McNamara's own. Perhaps that was all he had hoped to do, although it seems unlikely. A heroic view of history requires villains, whose malice must be invoked to explain the failure of the just. More often than not, this is as good an explanation as any, and in the face of some epic catastrophe it is usually the most comforting. In regard to the Vietnam War—which was, after all, perpetrated and subsequently abandoned according to the will of a great majority of the American public—it is a comforting notion of which we need to disabuse ourselves. □

James J. Uebbing *is the editor of* Love Had a Compass: Journals & Poetry *(Grove Press), a collection of Robert Lax's work.*

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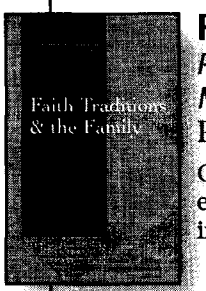

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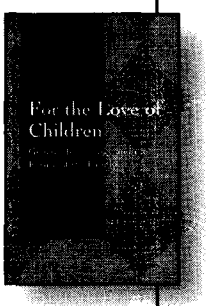

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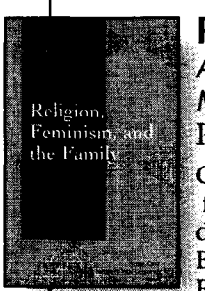

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

A rural perspective

Whatever Thomas Sweetser writes about parish life is worth reading. In his "Rx for Ailing Parishes" [September 13], however, he writes, as do most Catholic commentators, from an urban perspective, so that his prescription doesn't quite fit parish life in rural America. Most writers, for instance, assume that forming commu-

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nity is a problem. Not necessarily so in the rural setting, where parishioners see each other all week—at the feed mill, at the home of a neighbor who is also their hairdresser, at the local Dairy Queen. (There is a question, though, whether this community consciousness extends past their immediate boundaries. When a family gets burned out, their fellow parishioners are wonderful, but welcoming the Mexican migrant is another story.)

Again, rural people have a strong sense of ownership in their parish; after all, their parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents belonged to the same church. The problem is that they often expect things to remain the same, and make little distinction between the liturgical changes of Vatican II and whether to install central air conditioning in the church.

It gets even more complicated if we distinguish between the typical rural parish in the North, usually surrounded by churches of mainline Protestant denominations, and its counterpart in the South, in the midst of evangelical churches.

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ART ON ITS OWN TERMS

Walter Kerr

Walter Kerr, who died last month at the age of eighty-three, was Commonweal*'s drama critic from 1950-52. This article is condensed from his "Where the Author Meets the Critics,"* Commonweal, *April 7, 1950.*

The Catholic who would deal with the arts at the present time may think it necessary to turn himself into a schizophrenic. On the one hand his most respected mentors among Thomist philosophers assure him that art is a thing made, not a thing done, and hence not subject to moral evaluation. The artifact cannot commit a sin. On the other hand, this is just how much of what is called Catholic criticism does speak of books and plays. When I made a lecture tour among Catholic organizations recently, not a single question was asked me regarding the artistic merits of anything. The only questions were moral questions, morally phrased. I think it is fair enough to say that, among rank-and-file Catholics, the moral evaluation of art is the only evaluation now being made.

Fear is the keynote of all this. Those who are responsible for the moral guidance of men have an honest fear that if art were ever given its autonomy, were ever allowed to be judged by its own appropriate standards, it would somehow run off with the whole kit and caboodle of the Christian body.

The sad feature of these conflicts is that they are unnecessary. Saint Thomas resolved the issue when he stated his requirements for beauty. Of these three—integrity, proportion, and clarity—the first sheds a great deal of light on our present problem. Integrity means wholeness. It means that nothing is present which ought not to be there, and that nothing essential is absent.

Now the moralist's fear of art arises from this very requirement for beauty. If beauty demands that the wholeness of nature be imitated, and if, for instance, sin is to be found in nature, then sin must be found in art. To eliminate sin studiously would be to destroy the integrity of the work. It would be to alter the universe as God made or permitted it, as though to improve on it. When the pietist counsels us to draw men not as they are but as they ought to be—to play down sin and play up virtue—he is asking us to alter the proportions, to omit something, to falsify the universe as it actually exists under the permitting hand of God. He simplifies the universe, makes it over into something easier and more obvious. But however good his intentions, what he produces is not true, not beautiful, and certainly not good.

To do all this he must ignore or abandon aesthetic norms. He must discard the notion of integrity for fear of the damage integrity may do. In place of a truth which beauty requires, he substitutes an ideal of untruth, as though an untruth were less capable of doing damage.

When pietistic writers turn out narratives in which sin either does not exist or is depicted without its motivating attractiveness, or turn out characters meant as models for emulation rather than imitations of such people as do exist, they too lack integrity. An element in nature is absent, in its true proportion at least, in their works. If Catholics as a whole have produced relatively little valid art in this country it is primarily for this reason.

The above judgments have been arrived at through exclusively aesthetic and philosophically appropriate norms. It should be obvious that moralistic judgment is unnecessary, having been precluded by a judgment formed within the proper boundaries. It should also be noted that no matter how high the "moral" praise for the pietistic work, it remains incapable of giving the work any artistic stature whatever.

The moralist, then, may retire his own forms of judgment without fear. He is under no obligation to evaluate the work as morally objectionable or unobjectionable. He has only to ask, or let the critic ask: Is it art, or is it not art?

This distinction between an aesthetic and a moral judgment, permitting as it does the aesthetic to take care of the work of art on its own terms, may in some quarters seem mere hair-splitting, designed for the intellectual comfort of the artist but with little practical value. I think the procedure matters a great deal, and here are some of the ways in which it matters:

- It permits the philosopher and the priest to talk the same language, and to mean the same things, which is always desirable.
- It permits the artist to understand what is required of him, without nervous *a priori* moral injunctions which send him submissively to his work with one eye shut—or defiantly to his work, leaving the church behind him.
- It will produce better art by Catholics and help discourage the bad art associated with Catholicism in this country.
- It will improve taste among the Catholic laity, providing proper standards in place of the uncritical praise now showered on whatever seems "safe" and the uncritical condemnation of whatever seems "sordid."
- It is the correct procedure, and we have no business dealing in makeshifts. □

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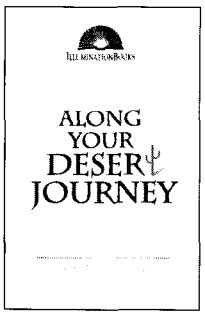

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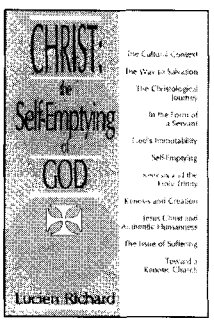

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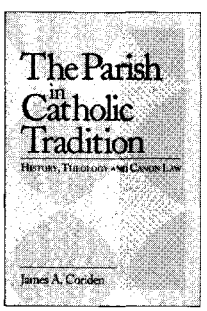

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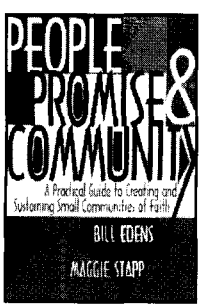

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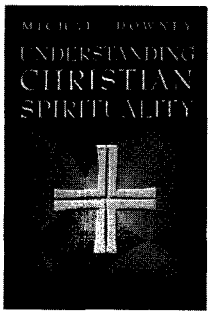

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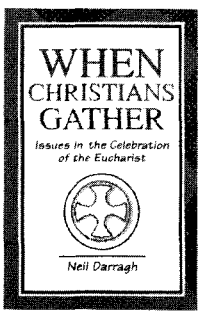

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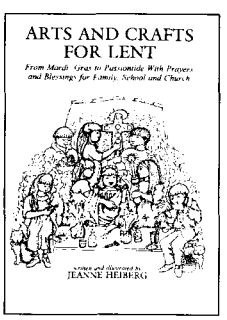
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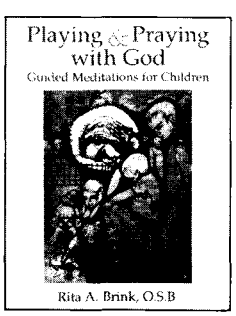

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